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ABSTRACT

The Equality of Educational Opportunity (EEO) Survey of 1966 shifted attention to outcomes in assessing whether opportunity has been equal. There is a second step to be taken: less attention to equality, more to excellence. There are two flaws in the equality concept in a racial context. One is its nearness of meaning to similarity or identity. The second is that equality is a relative term whereas excellence is an absolute one. We can discuss excellence without intergroup comparison, but equality can't exist unless blacks perform as well as whites. Thus, pressures toward equality of performance are more threatening to the concept of excellence than are pressures toward equality of opportunity. In talking of excellence and equality in education, it is necessary to specify their substance. Overall, skills in math, language, reasoning, technology, and self-presentation are the skills that blacks must have in as much abundance as whites in order to achieve either equality or excellence in the areas most richly recognized and rewarded in this society. It is time to go beyond the EEO Survey's findings of few differences among schools in terms of impact on students. Rather, we must seek out, assess, and generalize the success stories that are undoubtedly there, with confidence that understanding them may help them to multiply. (CMG)

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THE TASK BEFORE US

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In 1965-66, I participated in a survey ordered by Congress and conducted by the U.S. Office of Education, the Equality of Educational Opportunity Survey, which brought to public focus an emphasis on *outcomes* in assessing whether opportunity has been equal.

This was a massive survey and its impact on public policy and perception was massive. The fundamental findings were these: 1) There are important racial differences in educational readiness among entering first-grade students; that is, the schools do not create inequalities. 2) These racial differences persist throughout the school years, increasing in absolute terms and remaining constant in relative terms; that is, the schools do not remedy inequalities. 3) The problem of racial differences in educational competence is national, not regional; that is, the old Confederacy is not the only culprit. 4) The great variety of input measures, features of schools on which one school might differ from another, do not explain pupil differences; that is, the remedies we customarily trust and urge don't work. 5) Characteristics of the student population affect learning. For example, racial composition of the student body affects learning. Specifically, Blacks in majority White schools have higher test scores than Blacks in other situations, and, except where Blacks are a substantial majority, the presence of Blacks does not adversely affect the scores of Whites. 6) Certain beliefs about one's self correlate powerfully with test performance.

Widespread conclusions as to public policy included these: 1) Schools are insubstantial in their educational effects. 2) It is good for Blacks to attend majority White schools. 3) Racial inequality in education achievement is a massive national disgrace, and a massive effort to eliminate these inequalities should have high national priority. 4) Bussing and other devices to achieve racial balance in schools are desirable. 5) Teachers' expectations and other labeling processes are influences upon the learning of children, and sensitivity training

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to improve teachers' tolerance and appreciation for those socio-racially different from themselves deserves emphasis.

Those were optimistic days, and we were heady with the belief that all social ills could be remedied. We were optimistic also about the national capability and the nation's future. Much of this optimism has since evaporated. We now seem philosophically resigned to the intransigence of social evil. This changed national mood must be kept in mind as we think together.

Bussing has encountered increasing resistance. The resistance comes from a variety of sources and expresses itself in a variety of ways. Large numbers of Whites have left the public schools. Various Blacks charge that bussing is inherently racist and advocate the value of the neighborhood school to the Black community. Various Whites support the neighborhood concept too. The educational benefits from bussing have been challenged. There is no longer any reason to believe that any workable system of bussing will contribute in any significant way to reducing the racial difference in educational attainment, unless the beneficence may show itself in subsequent generations, that is, in very long-term positive effects.

Important boundary conditions

It is time to ask ourselves what we want to accomplish and how we think we can do it. The following boundary conditions seem important. 1) Minorities are politically powerless in a relative sense, almost as a matter of definition, but not so much so that the more blatant forms of discrimination can be practiced upon them. The law is on their side—somewhat more in its content than in its practice—and the opportunity to exercise choice of schools, curricula, and the like is greater than ever before. 2) Although the distribution of wealth and position still is radically unfavorable to Blacks, the number of Blacks who have achieved comfort, wealth, position, power, and prominence is now sufficiently large in numerous communities to bring effective pressure on the political process. 3) Once a right is established, energies devoted to establishing that right may be directed elsewhere, such that the exercise of that right may be subdued though its maintenance continues to be seen as vital.

As a derivative of the third boundary condition, we may expect to see the Black community look within itself for resources, principles,

and direction, but in a vastly different spirit from being forced to do so by the institutions of discrimination and segregation. Separation freely and selectively chosen is a vastly different phenomenon from separation externally imposed and required.

Let me return to the EEO study and its results in order to explore two themes: 1) the relation between equality of opportunity and excellence of outcomes, and 2) the nature of minority self-determination in a pluralistic society.

Less attention to equality, more attention to excellence

I mentioned earlier that we shifted attention to *outcomes* in assessing opportunity. There is a second step to be made: lessened attention to equality, more attention to excellence. There are two flaws with the equality concept in racial context. One is its nearness of meaning to similarity or identity—if we are indistinguishable, how can we not be equal? The second, to which I'd like to give a bit more attention, is that equality is a relative term whereas excellence is an absolute one. This conference, I am pleased to say, uses the word *excellence*, not *equality*. It is possible to remove a man from a ditch by lowering the level of the earth around and near him, just as it is possible to eliminate the difference between high achievers and low achievers by eliminating high achievement. The public school authorities in my home community, in their delight that the pupils now score at the national average, seem indifferent to whether the national average is any good or may have plunged compared to previous times. Resources may be diverted to slow learners in such volume as to hobble the able and thereby reduce the gap between the two groups. So much attention may be given the educationally handicapped as to handicap the educationally superior, with overall mediocrity its consequence. Indeed, use of the word *superior* may become a "no-no," and to be called superior may be to bear an onus. We may be equal by being equally bad as surely as by being equally good.

Excellence, on the other hand, is an absolute term. It does not direct us to compare me with you or us with them. It focuses instead on how well we or they are doing, compared to some abstract standard. True, a comparative sense is often implicit. If I say that Brown

is an excellent shortstop, you will appreciate a context that establishes whether I mean relative to all the major league shortstops of all time or relative to all the 9-year-olds in this year's Gray-Y League in this town. But the point remains: We can discuss excellence but not equality without intergroup comparisons, and the words *In what sense?* are not so insistently required by the word *excellence* as are the words *Compared to what?* required by the word *equality*.

This means that Blacks may define and measure their own excellence without asking, How're we doing compared to Whites? And excellence is not inherently bounded to the performance of Whites. Equality can't exist except as Blacks do as well as Whites; excellence can. Pressures toward equality of performance are much more threatening to the concept of excellence than are pressures toward equality of opportunity. This is so because the latter says that everyone should have an equal chance to reach as high as he can, including the top, whereas the former says that all groups in equal ratio should reach the same levels and that, if necessary, the top might simply be abolished.

Excellence in what?

But I have begged another question. Both excellence and equality require specification of substance. Excellence *in what?* Equality *in what?* Perhaps I am excellent in trivial and valueless matters and you are excellent in matters of vast importance. Perhaps you and I are equal in things that don't matter and unequal in things that do. Perhaps I am superior to you in variables easily and often measured (e.g., verbal ability) but you are superior to me in variables measured infrequently and only with difficulty (e.g. civic mindedness). It is here that our conference title has perhaps not led us to where we need to be led. We of this conference are interested in, practiced in, and devoted to formal education, especially of a literary and scientific sort. It is not surprising that we assume we know what we mean by education, and that what we mean is intimately connected to verbal fluency, mathematical reasoning, scientific knowledge, and historical and literary analysis—knowledge that underlies the professions but not the crafts, the bureaucracy but not the streets. We neither teach nor measure happiness, gambling, loving, quilt making, coin collecting, dunking and dribbling, civility and civic mind-

edness, relaxation, conviviality, creativity, insight, loyalty, courage, integritv, kindness, insight, wisdom, wood carving, or interpersonal skills.

I mention this interesting point only to bring it forward to our attention. It is not surprising that those of us who gather for conferences and reflections of this sort, persons responsible for formal schooling, should reflect the interests of the enterprises we are engaged in and the undertakings to which we give our careers. Nor is it necessarily unfortunate or demeaning that we do so. But it is useful to remind ourselves that there are virtues additional to those we hold dear; we are as capable as anyone else of a certain narrowness of presumption. When we speak of excellence in education, we have to describe the *substance* of excellence and we have to recognize two very important facts. What we consciously teach is only a fragment of what students learn, and what we consciously test and evaluate is only a fragment of what we teach. I happen to believe that what we consciously teach is extremely important and that what we test and evaluate is extremely important. So I can accept that there are very important skills and knowledge areas with which we are not concerned, and perhaps ought to be, without denigrating the skill and knowledge areas with which we *are* concerned.

Overall, the skills that Blacks need for security and success in American life are the same skills that Whites need. Overall, a minority in both the numeric and power senses is unlikely to chart many new paths to glory. Such counterexamples as jazz and professional basketball are likely to be rare exceptions. (Harry Edwards has been eloquent in questioning a culture that encourages so many to spend so much hope and time seeking to become professional athletes, when there is little transferability of skills and the number who succeed are an infinitesimal proportion of the number who hope and try.) Overall, the skills with mathematics, language, reasoning, technology, and self-presentation that a modern nation requires and rewards are the skills that Blacks must have in as much abundance as Whites to achieve either equality or excellence in the areas where it counts the most, those most richly recognized and rewarded in the society we live in. At the risk of seeming unsympathetic to the divergent strains of American culture, let me emphasize that there are dominant motifs and values in American life and the minorities who display mastery of and conformity to these dominant motifs are the ones who will succeed, be rewarded, receive respect, acquire power,

and escape oppression. I do not speak the whole truth, but I speak an important truth when I say that minority self-determination—the free, unfettered definition of values and establishment of life-style—is unlikely, the more so on major than on peripheral issues. The dominant contours are established, external to the minority, by the majority.

Locating and understanding the success stories

We are ready to describe the task before us. Let me return once more to the EEO study. I noted in beginning these remarks that we found very little difference, school to school, in the educational impact schools have on their students. There is a remarkable sameness. The techniques we used, mass survey and multiple regression, *could* have displayed important differences between schools and they did not. This is a very important discovery, but it does not vouchsafe that there are no important differences between schools. It is likely that we did not see the trees for the forest. Great individual teachers, visionary and creative individual principals, outstanding individual schools, and specific success stories would be obscured rather than revealed by the design, sampling, and analytical techniques we used. We may have shown that haystacks surround the needles, but we did not show that the needles are not there. Ours was a *macro*scopic study. The task before us now is the old one of locating and understanding the success stories, abstracting from them the generalizations and principles that can be taught to others and implemented in institutions. This task calls for *micro*scopic studies, small, specific ones, resting on extensive observation and intensive analysis, free interplay between observation and hunch and between researcher and practitioner, close attention to the details of how students learn and how teachers teach, respect for the idiosyncratic as we search for the general, variables seen in context, and due distinction drawn between impacts on averages and impacts on individuals. Certain situations may move all students forward in about the same degree, while others may move some students ahead dramatically while actually reversing others.

I think the times are opportune. First, we are ready, partly in despair but largely in hope, to make new plans and try new ventures, knowing that certain things don't work as we hoped they

would and that the task is a tough one. Second, the blunt, intentional use of the state (government) as an instrument of oppression, with its acceptance of segregated institutions, has crumbled. The range of choice for Blacks has increased as the economic and political power of Blacks has increased. This allows more options to be examined more openly, and the maintenance of Black community institutions may now be a matter of choice rather than necessity. Third, social-science and educational-research personnel have become more sophisticated in their observational techniques. The logic of small scale studies, greater tolerance for the educated guess, simultaneous consideration of sets of variables, increased commitment to policy relevance, and other advances, including an increase in confidence, set the stage for a major cumulative understanding based on multiple, specific, limited studies. And finally, although we appreciate the contributions made to the canvas of American culture by street wisdom and Black English and their analogs more than we did some time ago, we are also more prepared than we were a decade or so ago to insist that they cannot substitute in American life for command of calculus and comprehension of computers. Thus the task before us is to seek out, assess, and generalize the success stories at both personal and school levels, confident that the success stories are there and confident that understanding them may help them multiply.